DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 066 987 FL 003 529

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TITLE	Culture Shock: What Problems in Acculturation Can Occur in a New Society?
PUB DATE	20 Jul 71
NOTE	18p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Acculturation; Biculturalism; Bilingual Students; *Culturally Disadvantaged; Cultural Pluralism; *Culture Conflict; *Language Instruction; Minority Group Children; Modern Languages; Socially Disadvantaged; Spanish Speaking; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Personal experiences illustrating the psychological phenomenon of "culture shock" are integrated with a discussion of the pedagogic significance of the process of acculturation. Problems encountered in acculturation processes appear to be particularly significant for teachers of English-as-a-second-language, and practical suggestions for improving the classroom situation for Spanish-speaking students are suggested. (RL)

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Culture Shock: What Problems in Acculturation Can Occur in a New Society?

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July 20, 1971

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Ruth Benedict, the noted anthropologist, defines culture as, "what really binds men together - the ideas and standards they have in common."[1] Anthropologists have long been involved in the study of culture and the process of culture change. As a future teacher of English as a Second Language I am very much concerned with the study and understanding of culture contact. There is an abundance of problems facing the newly-arrived "stranger" in a foreign country. The two basic problems are, in my experience and opinion, the conflicting need to become an accepted member of the new society and at the same time to preserve the culture and heritage of the native society. Such a situation can be confusing, frightening and discouraging for a child. I therefore think it is the responsibility of teachers such as myself to attempt to learn the customs and cultural values and attitudes of the children they hope to teach.

Culture contact has occured throughout history in several forms. The main reasons for culture contact are colonization of an underdeveloped society by a more developed dominant culture, voluntary emmigration of people to another land for varying reasons, forcible transplanting of groups of people to another land, and war. These situations of culture contact may result in various possibilities for cultural change. When a group of people comes in contact with another group there may be a fusion of the two groups as a result of miscegenation. This is called amalgamation. An example of this process is the settling of the frontier of the U.S. with a mixture of peoples form several Northern European countries who intermarried to eventually form the culture of white, middle America. Another possibility is accomodation which occurs when both groups involved in the culture contact make changes in their social and cultural forms in order to achieve a necessary degree of harmony. A third possibility is that the

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less dominant group may become part of the other group while still maintaining its original group identity. This is called cultural pluralism and is characteristic of the adaptation of the American Jew. The fourth possibility is assimilation which is achieved when the less dominant group, though the process may be gradual, eventually becomes a part of the other group. When the great waves of immigration from southern and eastern Europe began in the late nineteenth century the popular attitude among Americans was to "Americanize" them as quickly as possible. Milton M. Gordon, in his study of Assimilation in American Life, calls this the Anglo-conformity theory of assimilation. "While Americanization in its various stages had more than one emphasis, essentially it was a consciously articulated movement to strip the immigrant of his native culture and attachments and make him over into an American along Anglo-Saxon lines - all this to be accomplished with great rapidity. To use an image of a later day, it was an attempt at "pressure-cooking assimilation."[2]

Often the terms acculturation and assimilation are used synonymously. However, Gordon has designed an interesting paradigm for the understanding. of assimilation and in it he considers acculturation to be only the first step in the process of assimilation. He maintains that the process of full assimilation, although always taking place in varying degrees, can be broken down into seven basic steps:

1) Cultural or behavioral assimilation - acculturation (when the new group changes its cultural patterns to those of the host society)

2) Structural assimilation (when the new group is allowed to enter cliques, clubs and institutions of the host society)

3) Large-scale intermarriage - amalgamation

4) Identificational assimilation (the development of a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the host society)

5) Attitude receptional assimilation (when there is an absence of prejudiced feelings against the assimilating group)

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6) Behavior receptional assimilation (when there is an absence of discrimination against the assimilating group)

7) Civic assimilation (when there is an absence of value and power conflict between both groups).[3]

This model is helpful in understanding the contributing variables in the process of assimilation. However, for the teacher of English as a Second Language, a better frame of reference would be to consider the theory of cultural pluralism as a process of assimilation and also as an objective in teaching. The melting-pot concept idealistically stresses the intense intermingling of all groups to form a new "American" culture. This concept is impractical and has proved in this century to be irreconcilable with the patterns of assimilation which have taken place. Although the great proportion of immigrant groups who arrived in the U. S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have achieved an advanced degree of acculturation, they still maintain a high degree of ethnic identity.

This strong ethnic identity and the powerful forces of culture patterns will often cause a type of "culture shock" among new immigrants in a country. A teacher should be aware of this phenomenon in order to assure a comfortable learning situation for the students. I consider myself fortunate since I recently was a victim of "culture shock" and therefore am better able to understand the confusion and discomfort of so many children involved in the English as a Second Language program.

Last year I spent several months as a volunteer teacher in a border development town in Israel. Upon my arrival in Israel I had no knowledge of Hebrew and also no background about the "development town" or the people who inhabit these towns. These towns have been set up by the Israeli government in an effort to deal with the large numbers of immigrants arriving from North Africa and parts of the Middle East. The town I was assigned to has a population of approximately ten thousand French Moroccan people. The

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town is about ten years old so that most of these people have already learned the Hebrew language and have adapted, in varying degrees, to Israeli culture. As a volunteer from the United States, I was received with anything but open arms. My language problem, as well as my New York City background, caused a general feeling of unhappiness and disorientation. Often the people whom I dealt with were themselves suffering from "culture shock" since modern technological advancements such as indoor plumbing were unknown to them until their arrival in Israel. Strangely enough, my own Jewish identity did not serve as a means of communication between the people of the town and myself. They thought of me as an American and the fact that I am a Jew was insignificant in their attitudes toward me. Another source of "culture shock" was the constant reminder that a war was going on. Because the town I lived in was very close to both the Lebanese and Syrian borders there was a good deal of bombing in the distance along with a few direct hits on the town. The presence of tanks and soldiers everywhere was a rather strange thing for a teacher from New York City to accustom herself to. Of course, my need for acculturation was only temporary and the degree of "culture shock" was therefore lessened by this knowledge. However, the depression I felt because I was an unwelcome stranger and my frequent feelings of inadequacy due to the lack of proficiency in another language and knowledge of alien customs is, I am sure, quite similar to the feelings of a child from Burma, Japan or Greece who is thrown into the foreign ground of New York City.

In an effort to understand how different cultures adapt to the culture of the United States I shall first examine the general cultural patterns of the United States and then contrast these patterns with the cultures of several major groups who have immigrated or are in the process of immigrating to the United States.

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The study of American white middle class culture is naturally a monumental proposition. Here I shall try to underline a few basic problems crucial for an understanding of the "American way of life". Christianity has been a major force in developing American attitudes and values. The Christian virtues of honesty, love for one's neighbors, gentleness, kindness, generosity and equality of men are esteemed. Naturally, these qualities are often ignored in the American drives for upward economic and social mobility, technological advancement and security. The"American family" is a cohesive, warm, loving unit which teaches the importance of individuality and strives for moral virtue. Sex is acceptable only within the bonds of matrimony. American middle class culture teaches that anyone who works hard and struggles competitively will succeed. It prides itself on the vast accomplishments of private enterprise and democratic government, to the point of reinforcing the feeling of American superiority. It inconsistently maintains an in-group, out-group frame of reference. Women, although allowed more opportunities than in some cultures, are generally expected to lead fulfilling lives as wives and mothers. Although individuality is allowed expression, conformity is expected and these expectations are taught from early childhood. The American white middle-class culture is of course filled with hypocrisy but this is what the new immigrant encounters in the process of adjusting.

Education for white, middle-class America is revered as a means of acquiring upward mobility. However, education does not exist solely for the purpose of vocational training; it gives children the chance to become well-rounded individuals and prepares them for a good adult life with the proper moral outlook. It gives children the opportunity to practice the competitive spirit they will need for a successful adult life and it serves as a disciplinary agent which demands docility in children. I do not agree

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with many of these educational objectives but I am simply relating them as I have observed them to exist in white middle-class America.

I shall now discuss three different groups of immigrants and the problems in acculturation that they have faced as a result of cultural forms which conflict with traditional cultural patterns of white middle-class America.

First, from an historical perspective I shall consider two groups, the Eastern European Jews and the Southern Italians and then from a more contemporary perspective I shall deal with the acculturation of Puerto Ricans.

Although there was an immigration of Jews to the United States before the great waves of immigration at around the turn of the century, the majority of Jews arrived at that time. These Jews were from Eastern Europe and their language and customs differed from those of the Sephardic (Spanish and Portuguese) Jews and German Jews who had settled in the United States before them. Most Jews came to the United States in an effort to flee the religious persecution that has so thoroughly pervaded the history of the Jews. The great number of Eastern European Jews in the United States "created a Jewish subculture in which almost everyone knew and used a few Yiddish expressions, and which has served as the first stage in the assimilation to America of very different kinds of Jewish immigrants."[4]

One major force that has kept the Jews in the U.S. linked together is the "sense of a common fate ". "In part, the common sense of fate is defined ultimately by connection to a single religion, to which everyone is still attached by birth and tradition if not by action and belief. In part, it reflects the imposition of a common fate by the outer world whether, in the form of Hitler's extermination or the mild differential behavior that is met in America today."[5]

These Jewish immigrants became members of the working class and found

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jobs in the garment industry in New York. (The Jewish population in New York today is one-quarter of the city's population, which it has been since 1910 - New York City and its suburbs include one -half of the entire Jewish population in the U. S.) Many Jews became owners of small businesses, a tradition that has continued today.

I feel that three basic factors have contributed to the cultural pluralism which the Jew has achieved in American society. These three factors have facilitated adjustment and success in an often hostile society. The first factor is the strength of the Jewish family, the second is the sense of a common fate, mentioned before, which has led to the development of American Jewish organizations on national as well as local levels, and the third is the Jewish attitude towards education.

The Jewish religion dictates the importance of the family. Although women traditionally occupy a lower status than their husbands they are given a place of honor within the family. Children are the focal point of the Jewish family and are at the center of attention and concern of their parents. Jewish families are generally well-planned and small. "Although its distinctiveness is decreasing, Jewish family life is still a strong unifying force. It is possible that Jewish family solidarity tends to be strengthened by prejudice, whereas the effect of prejudice and discrimination on more economically disadvantaged groups without traditions of family solidarity is to weaken the family."[6]

The extreme sense of Jewish consciousness has been a cause of the large number of Jewish organizations such as the B'nai Brith, the United Jewish Appeal, the American Jewish Committee, etc. These organizations have worked against anti-semitism in the country while at the same time serving to maintain the separateness of the American Jewish community.

Above all, the Jewish attitude toward education has contributed to the high degree of upward mobility of the Jewish population. Jewish children

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are conditioned from the start to value the importance of a college education and the cohesiveness and verbal quality of Jewish family life reinforces this attitude. For these reasons, a large proportion of second and third generation Jews go to college and pursue professional careers.

The same wave of immigration that brought most of the Eastern European Jews to the U.S. also brought a tremendous number of Italians from the south of Italy. These people came to the United States seeking better economic conditions then they knew as peasants and landless laborers in Italy. The intense dislike for southern Italians and Sicilians by their northern countrymen moved with the immigrants to America although the larger percentage was from the south.

Most of the immigrant Italians worked on construction projects in the northeastern section of the country and as the Jews, most settled in New York.

The tightness of village ties accompanied these immigrants and the Italian communities in the United States kept these ties alive. The Italians are very cautious of outsiders and thus like the Jews maintain their separateness in residence as well as ethnic identity. The Italian sense of family, however, overshadowed any type of sense of common fate characteristic of the Jews and therefore the organizational pattern exemplified by the Jews did not develop to the same unifying degree with the Italians.

A major difference between the Italian and Jewish families is the feeling among Italians that family ties are of supreme importance. Therefore, while it is relatively easy for a Jewish child to break the tight familial bonds and seek to improve himself through education, it is difficult for an Italian child to break his family ties. Italians stress family-improvement whereas the Jews stress self-improvement (which is more in accord with the cultural attitudes of white middle-class America).

Again, in contrast with the Jewish pattern, Italian families are

much larger and not as well planned, a consequence of the Roman Catholic attitude about contraception. Also, Italian families are more adult than child-centured. This leads to the Italian attitude toward education. "Despite a strong desire for material improvement, the Italian family did not see a role for education in America. One improved one's circumstances by hard work, perhaps by a lucky strike, but not by spending time in a school, taught by women, who didn't even beat the children. Parents felt that children should contribute to the family budget as soon as possible, and that was years before the time fixed by the state for the end of their education. Truancy and drop-outs were a constant porblem, and were often abetted by the parents, who wanted the children to help out in the shop or store."[7]

An interesting aspect of Italian culture, which may be compared with the Spanish concept of machismo, is the dominance of the Italian male and the need to exhibit this in his behavior. This may be another of the reasons that Italian children adjusted so slowly to the school system in America which emphasizes docility and feminine behavioral patterns.

Religiously, Italians have become quite "Americanized". They have generally given up the traditional south Italian village church and have developed a strong identification with American Roman Catholicism which is not limited to Italians. "The new suburban Catholicism is stronger than the Catholicism of the old neighborhood. It also operates as a special variant of the melting pot for the American - Italian group. In the old neighborhood there was antagonism between Irish and Italian Catholics.... The Irish and Italians, who often contended with each other in the city, may work together and with other groups in the Church in the surburbs, and their separate ethnic identities are gradually being muted in the common identity of American Catholicism."[8]

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The immigration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. is peculiar in that these immigrants come to America as U. S. citizens. There is a great tendency for Puerto Ricans to move back and forth between Puerto Rico and the cities, especially New York, in the Northeast where they have settled. This fact is attested to by the large turnover of Puerto Rican children in the New York City public schools. After World War II, with the establishment of air transportation between San Juan and New York, Puerto Rican migration increased rapidly. Basically, the reason for the migration was to seek better economic conditions in the U.S. "The American standard of living, experienced indirectly and directly through mass media and personal contacts, was a powerful agitating force. And as the Puerto Rican population of New York itself grew, and migrants and their children went back and forth by cheap airplane, everyone had direct personal knowledge of what life was like in New York. Once the stream is started and the road open, once the path is made easy, any minor cause may be sufficient to decide to try one's luck in New York: a poor marriage, overbearing parents, a sense of adventure, a desire to see New York itself."[9]

Most of the Puerto Rican migrants who come to the U. S. are very poor, urban slum-dwellers. They have been brought up in what Oscar Lewis refers to as the culture of poverty and this continues when they settle in the U. S. Puerto Rican cultural consciousness is not as strong as the other groups I have mentioned. Before the Spanish conquest of Puerto Rico the Puerto Rican Indian culture was relatively simple and undeveloped. Puerto Ricans have very little awareness of this culture, just as the Puerto Rican Blacks, descended from slaves brought over by the Spanish, have very little African identity. Lewis speaks of the Hispanization by Puerto Ricans of many English words. "This mixture of the two languages has been decried by many Puerto Rican leaders and intellectuals as a symptom of cultural breakdown and as a threat to the Spanish language, which is the single

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most important basis of Puerto Rican cultural identity."[10]

The lower-class Puerto Rican family is often the result of a consensual marriage and therefore many Puerto Rican children are illegitimate. These marriages break up very frequently and people often have several marriages in a lifetime. Obviously these cultural patterns are antagonistic to the values of white middle-class America concerning marriage. Puerto Rican men are concerned with machismo (the expression of their manliness) and a young boy is socialized accordingly. Here, again, American white middle-class values about school are in conflict with the Puerto Rican boy's need to show his machismo. Lewis describes the Puerto Rican slum dwellers' way of life: "they show a great zest for life, especially for sex, and a need for excitement, new experiences and adventures. Theirs is an expressive style of life." [11]

The Puerto Ricans who migrate to the U. S. are generally not very religious although they are Catholic for the most part. Most of these people who are employed are factory workers and the general standard of living is very low, with a large percentage on welfare. Puerto Rican men seem to acculturate more readily than the women, who are much more conservative and express more negative feelings to North Americans. Puerto Rican community organization is relatively weak and thus has not facilitated acculturation as did the strong organizational system of the Jews. "It may very well be that it is because the Puerto Rican group has been so well supplied with paternalistic guidance from their own government, as well as with social services by city and private agencies, that it has not developed powerful grass-roots organizations."[12] Thus, many of the patterns significant among groups who have acculturated rather smoothly and attained a strong level of cultural pluralism are absent in the culture of the lower-class Puerto Rican who migrates to the mainland. The main factor is the lack of a strong sense of group identification which could be strengthened

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by preservation of the Spanish language through bilingual approaches to education .

"Two Languages Spoken Here", an article from Grade Teacher, April, 1970, is concerned with the bilingual approach to second language learning. Mr. Zirkel, the author, is involved in the study of bilingual programs as an administrative intern in the Connecticut State Department of Education. His article deals with a federally-funded bilingual program which began a year ago in New Haven, Connecticut. The program was initiated as a result of meetings between the New Haven school system and the Spanish-speaking community in New Haven. The inconsistency and superficiality of the English as a Second Language Program for Spanish-speaking children was in desperate need of overhauling, as is the case in New York and in other large metropolitan communities where children who do not speak English are allowed to become silent strangers.

Mr. Zirkel emphasizes the fact that the bilingual approach to second language teaching, through the utilization of both languages,(in this case Spanish and English) allows for the perservation of the Spanish culture while at the same time enabling acquisition of facility with English. He also argues that this program will enable English-speaking children to learn the language and culture of their Spanish classmates. However, the question is raised as to what degree children will really be able to share and understand one another's cultures. Will the program be able to surpass the level of simply making superficial cultural contrasts?

Mr. Zirkel discusses the team-teaching approach of the program. Each classroom has a regular teacher who is a native speaker of English and a bilingual teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish. These teachers are assisted by bilingual aides and a TESOL teacher who works with the Spanish-speaking children. The ultimate objective of the program is for all the

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children involved to achieve competence in both languages after a five year period. The team-teacher method provides a model for children to follow in learning and respecting a foreign language and culture.

Mr. Zirkel attributes the increased activity and concern on the part of Spanish-speaking parents to the bilingual program. I agree with him that there is a very strong need to maintain a sense of pride in the heritage and language of non-native speakers of English. This newly reborn sense of pride is probably largely responsible for the growing parent participation.

Mr. Zirkel speaks very optimistically about the evaluations conducted thus far, although he does concede that it is far two early to accurately evaluate the program. He speaks of the vocabulary improvements shown by both Spanish and English-speaking children. Again, I must question the thoroughness of the program. How does it plan to eliminate the discrepancy between extra-curricular reinforcement in the second language? Spanish-speaking children will naturally receive reinforcement through exposure to the mass media. After all, they are living in an English language bath. Since the English-speaking children will be receiving virtually all of their language education in school how will they be able to maintain any level of bilingualism? This leads to my next question concerning the provisions, if any, for a transitional period. Will the Spanish-speaking children continue to learn math, social studies, science, etc. in Spanish through the sixth grade and then suddenly be expected to change completely to English in Junior High School?

I agree emphatically with Mr. Zirkel that the bilingual approach to second language teaching is valuable. It is very important to give children the opportunity to experience a feeling of pride in their cultural background, just as it is important to expose all children to different cultures. This method also gives non-native speakers of English an opportunity to prove themselves and to learn at a steady rate without the feeling of

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utter confusion and failure experienced by many children who have not yet learned English. However, this method cannot provide a solution for schools with heavy populations of, for example, Japanese, Spanish, English and Greek- speaking children. It seems that a near-optimum situation with a roughly equal proportion of children speaking two different languages is a prerequisite for success with the bilingual approach.

The teacher of English as a Second Language must remain attuned to the acculturation patterns and problems of the various immigrant groups whom he teaches. I feel that in-service courses dealing with the cultures of these immigrants groups would be beneficial to the TESOL program. I also feel that the graduate programs which prepare teachers of English as a Second Language must recognize the need for required courses in anthropology and sociology as a means of broadening the students' understanding of culture and society.

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Footnotes

[1]Ruth Benedict, "Pattern and Diversity in Culture," in Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, ed. John Middleton, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. 12.

[2]Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 99.

[3]Ibid., p. 71.

[4] Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1970), p. 141.

[5]Ibid., p. 142.

[6]George E. Simpson and J. Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 360.

[7]Glazer and Moynihan, p. 199.

[8]Ibid., pp. 203-204.

[9]Ibid., p. 97.

[10]Oscar Lewis, La Vida, (New York: Random House, 1966), p. xvii.

[11]Ibid., p. xxvi.

[12]Glazer and Moynihan, p. 110.

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